NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
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Ministry of Attorney General

Chilliwack Indigenous Court moving closer to community it serves
Court now operates on Stó:lō land at Qw'oqw'elith'a (Coqualeetza)

CHILLIWACK –

Summary

- *The Chilliwack Indigenous Court has moved closer to the people it serves, from the Chilliwack courthouse to Siyá:m Lálem, a space on Qw'oqw'elith'a (Coqualeetza) grounds owned by the Stó:lō Collective*
- *Siyá:m Lálem offers a culturally grounded setting, support services through the Stó:lō Service Agency and more room for Elders, families, victims and community members to take part in the court process*
- *Holding court in the community supports healing and accountability for victims, families, others affected and the people before the court*

Chilliwack's Indigenous Court has moved closer to the people it serves, from the Chilliwack courthouse to Siyá:m Lálem, a space on Qw'oqw'elith'a (Coqualeetza) grounds owned by the Stó:lō Collective.

"Indigenous courts do their best work when Elders, families, victims and community can participate," said Niki Sharma, Attorney General. "I want to thank the Stó:lō Collective for welcoming the court into their space, and the Provincial Court, Qwí:qwelstóm and partners for their continued leadership. Together, we are making the justice system work better for Indigenous Peoples and their communities."

Why the court moved

The new space is larger, closer to the First Nations communities and designed to offer a more culturally appropriate setting for victims, community members and the people who come before the court. The new location will make it easier for Elders, families and support people to take part in the healing-focused process.

The Ministry of Attorney General's Court Services Branch, which manages courtroom administration, worked with the Provincial Court, the Qwí:qwelstóm Justice Program and the Stó:lō Collective to set up the new space. The move does not change the court process. Independent Provincial Court judges continue to decide how each matter is heard.

What people coming to court should know

- As of Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026, people with a matter in the Chilliwack Indigenous Court should go to Siyá:m Lálem (Stó:lō Government House), 8B-7201 Vedder Road, Chilliwack.
- Court dates and process have not changed.
- People with questions can contact the Chilliwack court registry at 604-795-8350.
- Free parking is available on site. The location is on a major public transit route and is fully accessible.

How the court works

Indigenous courts focus on understanding the root causes of offending behaviours. Participants work with a team that includes Elders, a judge, legal counsel and Native court workers or First Nations court navigators to create a healing plan shaped around them and their community. Healing plans are intended to restore balance for the victim, the community and the person responsible for the harm, and can include cultural practices, land-based healing and ceremonies, counselling, addictions treatment and community service.

Supporting Indigenous sentencing courts is part of the Province's broader work to advance reconciliation and create a justice system that is accessible for everyone. These courts help make communities in B.C. safer by strengthening community connections and creating a justice system that works better for all.

Through initiatives, such as Indigenous Justice Centres and the implementation of the BC First Nations Justice Strategy, government is working with First Nations and Indigenous justice partners to support approaches that better respect and address the needs of Indigenous Peoples.

Quotes:

Spencer Chandra Herbert, Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation –

"Creating a safe space for community and culture is an important part of our commitment to justice and improving the lives for everyone in British Columbia. This new, larger Indigenous Court space at Siyam Lalem will make it easier for Elders, families, victims and community members to navigate the justice system and find support on the path to accountability and healing."

Chief Alisha Peters (Schewótiya), Sqwá First Nation –

"Sharing space with the provincial justice system strengthens the commitment to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action. The First Nations Court shows that Indigenous-led justice and provincial systems can stand together in service of safety, healing and accountability."

Melissa Gillespie, chief judge, Provincial Court of British Columbia –

"The Provincial Court is grateful to be welcomed into the Siyam Lalem, a Stó:lō Nation community space. Holding the court in the community is a step towards reconciliation and strengthens the connection between the court and the people it serves, helping to build relationships and make justice more accessible. The Provincial Court appreciates the community's work to make this possible. We also want to thank the Elders, court staff, counsel, service providers, police, Legal Aid BC and BC Corrections who have worked to support this

important step.”

Quick Facts:

- Since opening on Dec. 11, 2025, the Chilliwack Indigenous Court has held one sitting a month and heard an average of 10 cases each sitting day.
- The court is supported by the Qwí:qwelstóm Justice Program, operated by the Stó:lō Service Agency.
- It is a pilot scheduled to operate until March 2027.

Learn More:

- For more about how Indigenous sentencing courts work, visit the Provincial Court of British Columbia: https://www.provincialcourt.bc.ca/navigating-court-case/criminal-adult-and-youth/indigenous-sentencing-and-specialized-criminal-courts/indigenous-sentencing-courts
- To learn how an Indigenous sentencing court can help, visit Legal Aid BC: https://aboriginal.legalaid.bc.ca/courts-criminal-cases/first-nations-court
- To read about the opening of the Chilliwack Indigenous Court in December 2025, visit: https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2025AG0073-001262

A backgrounder follows.

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BACKGROUNDER

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How Indigenous sentencing courts work in B.C.

The Chilliwack Indigenous Court is one of 10 Indigenous sentencing courts in B.C. Each one takes a holistic and restorative approach to sentencing and is designed to meet the needs of the community it serves.

Who can use an Indigenous sentencing court

- People who identify as Indigenous and intend to plead guilty to a criminal offence.
- In some courts, Crown counsel must also agree to the person taking part.
- Eligibility depends on the offences each court accepts. Most cases are for less serious offences.
- Indigenous sentencing courts do not conduct trials.

Other Indigenous courts in B.C.

There are nine other Indigenous courts operating in B.C:

- New Westminster First Nations court
- North Vancouver Chet wa nexwníẃ ta S7ekw'í7tel Indigenous court
- Kamloops Cknu'cwentn First Nations sentencing court
- Duncan First Nations court
- Nicola Valley Indigenous court
- Prince George Indigenous court
- Williams Lake Indigenous court
- Hazelton Indigenous court
- Lillooet Indigenous court

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